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DENISON, Iowa --- Actor Alan Young doesn't mind talking about playing a sidekick to a talking horse.

Of course, of course.

Young was architect Wilbur Post on the hit comedy "Mr. Ed," which ran from 1961-65 on CBS-TV. Ed, a palomino whose real name was Bamboo Harvester, was top banana. Ed's hearty voice was provided by Rocky Lane, an actor who appeared in a stable of 1930s low-budget Westerns.

Two years ago, Young attended his first Donna Reed Festival here. He enjoyed it so much he asked to come back. This year, Young presented a workshop on stage presence and spoke on the panel "Sitcoms From the '50s to the '90s."

A recurring theme of the panel, conducted by Stephen Winzenburg, communications professor at Grand View College in Des Moines, was the idealistic expectations of early 1960s sitcoms such as "The Donna Reed Show," "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver." Life was beyond perfect. Everyone wanted to live in Beaver Cleaver's suburban Mayfield. Everyone wanted a mom like Donna Reed.

"I don't think everyone wanted to talk to a horse," Young said with a chuckle during an

interview in the Denison High School library. "Our show was not mainstream. But it was the same concept: The man was the man of the house and the woman was the ditz who had to say, 'Coffee's ready, dear.' But in the end, the women always saved the day.

"My show was peculiar because I had a horse that was smarter than me and a wife who was smarter than I was."

Young, 76, is a humble man. He's the voice of Scrooge McDuck on the animated series "DuckTales," and won two Emmy Awards for "The Alan Young Show." He loves discussing "Mr. Ed."

Comedian George Burns financed an unsuccessful "Mr. Ed" pilot with another actor slotted as Wilbur Post. Burns told his partner, "We should get Alan Young - he looks like the kind of a guy a horse would talk to." Burns knew him from "The Alan Young Show," which ran on CBS from 1950-53. In critiquing the show, TV Guide called Young "the Charlie Chaplin of television."

Young was flippant when he was first approached about "Mr. Ed," telling the creators, "I don't like to work with anybody who can't clean up after himself." Eight years later, Burns made a 15-minute pilot and Young was dispatched to Chicago and other ports to sell "Mr. Ed" to Studebaker Corp. dealers.

Young said, "They would take \$20 out of each sale, which paid for the first 'Ed' show. And I loved doing the show. Working with a horse gave me lots of pantomime opportunities. I couldn't move my hands because Ed's head would follow my hands. I had to stand still and use my face as much as possible. Having done pantomime for a long time, it was easy for me."

Over the years, Young has kept his lips sealed about how trainers got Ed to move his mouth. He'd kid interviewers about using tricks like nylon string or peanut butter in Ed's orifice. "That wasn't it," Young said. "But the point was to have Ed stop on cue. By the second year, his mouth would start to move as soon as I finished talking. I used to ride Ed every morning. One day (trainer Lester Hilton) and I were riding along, we're talking and Lester starts laughing. Ed's mouth started to move! He heard my voice; he knew he had to do something.

"Ed was a beautiful horse. That white mane of his was gorgeous. He was named Bamboo Harvester because of his bamboo color, but they changed his name. I always joked about how Ed got into show business and right away he was gelded and his name was changed - which happens to all of us."

The sitcoms of the 1960s are being reborn as movies. "Flipper" and "McHale's Navy" have landed on the big screen, and film versions of "Gilligan's Island" and "Leave It to Beaver" are in production. Young said Disney Studios has the film rights to "Mr. Ed."

"Over the last few years I've written three (Ed) stories for film," said Young, who wrote "Mickey's Christmas Carol" for Disney. "My writing partner and I just finished collaborating on an idea for Ed and all the animals of the world. It's called 'The Great Animal Rebellion,' and animals bring the whole world to a stop. They're fed up with what mankind's doing to each other and doing to them. The fish are throwing their nets back, things like that."

Joyce Campoll, 14, of Glen Ellyn took the sitcom class. She said "Mr. Ed" is one of her favorite shows. "I'm sorry, but I just love the horse," Campoll said. "He's really cute. The new stuff (on television) is funny, but people are getting too lenient on what's OK. Some of it is disgusting. It's nice to see this old stuff."